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UTILIZING THE HARVEST

A radio talk by D. W. Watkins, Director of Extension, South Carolina State College, delivered in the Land Grant College program, Wednesday, September 18, 1935, and broadcast by NBC and a network of 50 associated radio stations.

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The farms of the Nation have again brought forth an adequate food and fibre supply. Long months of necessary work and management have been aimed at the use of this harvest for the satisfaction of human wants throughout the land.

Modern farming, because so much space is required for its operations, is made up of about six million family sized units. These units, though separately managed, are economically related and dependent on each other. Their products are for consumers everywhere. Perhaps the first widespread use of the harvest comes when farmers begin to pour their cash crops into the markets for further processing and distribution. When the receipts from crops exceeds the cost the "new money" thus made available pays debts and taxes, wages and profits. At this season, therefore, confidence is strengthened that the Nation will continue to be fed, clothed and housed. Whereas in Nature Spring is the season of revival and growth, in business and industry the Fall brings a quickening of pulse and a revival of activity. The farmer's contribution to the national welfare coming regularly each year at the harvest season is like the heartbeat which keeps the lifeblood of new business flowing to the extremities of the country. If this lifeblood fails, as it practically does in years of six cent cotton, 30 cent wheat, and four dollar hogs, it means that the economic body has virtually missed its annual heartbeat. No man can escape the effects of poor circulation of money and goods which follows this missing heartbeat. Neither can anyone fail to benefit when a normal income to farmers promotes a livelier business activity.

In the Palmetto State of South Carolina, the chief cash crops are cotton, cotton seed, tobacco, forest products, truck and fruit crops, and a small business in livestock and its products. For home use the farms produce practically everything that will grow in the temperate zone, but mainly corn, oats, wheat, hay, garden produce, poultry, eggs, pork, milk and butter. Most of the farm homes are built either wholly or partially from lumber and materials from the farms. The soil and climate permit an excellent food standard and many farmers have such a standard. However, the credit system associated with the tenant problem tends to cause many farmers to devote their energies mainly to market crops in order to meet cash obligations.

The Extension Service and farm leaders are working toward two objectives: First, economical production and efficient marketing of cash crops; and second, improvement in rural living standards. The procedure and accomplishments with the cotton crop of the Palmetto State will serve as an example of how these objectives are approached. Of course rational utilization is the final aim.

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Ten years ago only about 20 percent of the South Carolina cotton crop was of superior staple length--that is, as long as 15/16 inches or more. Most of the crop was unsatisfactory for local use and had to be exported beyond the borders of the State. Pre-boll weevil methods of growing the crop were still in vogue. Many observers were saying that cotton was passing out of this region as did rice a few decades ago. An attack was launched on three fronts: First, for better quality of cotton, second, for boll weevil control, and third, for larger yields per acre through closer spacing, more intelligent fertilization and better cultivation. Here was a job for the organized intelligence of the State. The Extension Service promulgated a Statewide 5-Acre Cotton Contest, beginning in 1926. The contest was financed the first year by a leading newspaper, and since that time by a group of cotton manufacturers. Over 6,000 five-acre contest fields have been planted. Each of these has been a source of improved seed developed originally by seed breeders. About 3,000 detailed records and samples have been analyzed, and the lessons therefrom passed along to cotton growers. All available information has been brought to bear on the cotton problem. The results in brief are:

First, 80 percent of last year's crop was 15/16 inches or better in staple length as compared with about 20 percent at the beginning of the contest -- a remarkable achievement, worth over 1 million dollars per year in premiums paid South Carolina farmers. Incidentally cotton producers everywhere this year should ask for and receive the usual market premiums for better staples and grades from buyers on primary markets.

Second, South Carolina mills now demand and use practically all the cotton crop grown in this state.

Third, the practice of cheap and easy methods of boll weevil control along with closer spacing of plants and more intelligent fertilization had gone far toward restoring normal yields, even prior to the crop control program.

The principles followed in saving the cotton industry in this state were followed by Danish farmers in producing a supply of hogs for the London market. These principles are being applied to other less important crops in South Carolina. More efficient production of quality products plus a national policy of crop control are the means to "a balanced abundance."

The cotton and tobacco control programs have made it possible for farmers to give more time and thought to preserving national resources of soil, while producing the foodstuffs needed for health. The narrow diet of many cotton farmers, especially share croppers and tenants, does not make for individual health and efficiency. Desirable foodstuffs not produced under the one-crop system often were simply dispensed with, due to small gross incomes of farmers. Many are coming to realize that adequate subsistence is a primary object in farming. To improve food standards, farm and home agents are spreading the practices of the best farmers and their wives in the production, canning, conserving and use of an adequate food supply. In reducing the cotton crop, cotton growers have enormously reduced the cotton seed oil crop, which competes directly with domestic lard. But in increasing home food supplies in South Carolina they have in the main only filled a traditional void in their food standards. Thus are they preparing to better care for the large farm population of the State, while participating in a national farm program.